Volume II.
Number 19.

Week of
November 17, 1941

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of November 17, 1941.
†"Spring Again" opened Monday, November 10th, at the Henry Miller Theatre.
†"Macbeth" opened Tuesday, November 11th, at the National Theatre.
†"Theatre" opened Wednesday, November 12th, at the Hudson Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
$15.00

"Macbeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 12, 1941*

The Most Successful Macbeth of Our Day Is Presented

By JOHN MASON BROWN

HAMLET on the stage is familiar to us all. Again and again, with this actor or that, interpreted in one fashion or another, it has left the library to make the footlights gleam the brighter. But Macbeth is different. Although players as dissimilar as Walter Hampden, Lynn Harding, Fritz Leiber, Lionel Barrymore, Philip Merivale, E. H. Sothern and Robert B. Mantell have been drawn to it, Macbeth has resisted production in our time. Not until last night at the National when Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson appeared in it, and the script was given the benefit of Margaret Webster's quickening direction, have the excitements of the tragedy proven contagious in the contemporary theatre.

The play is a difficult one, and difficult for a variety of reasons. Poetasters and philosophers have long insisted that its splendors are literary rather than theatrical. Borrowing from Charles Lamb's famous paradox, they have maintained that, just as the theatre cannot hope to do more than travesty nature when it tries to present the storms raging both on the heath and in the old monarch's mind in King Lear, so the verbal splendors of those torments which assail Macbeth are bound to be lost sight of when one follows his misdeeds on a stage.

Taking this same line, there have been those who have claimed that what Macbeth does is unimportant compared with what Macbeth feels and thinks; that his tragedy becomes only a murderer's tale when acted; and hence ceases to be the glorious expression of a poetic melancholy which it is when read. Others, for more than a century, have pointed out that the witches make Macbeth ridiculous in an age which can no longer be frightened by the supernatural. Still others, with a more practical realization of the acting problems presented by Macbeth himself, have agreed with Hazlitt's verdict when he wrote, "We can conceive a common actor to play Richard tolerably well; we can conceive no one to play Macbeth properly."

* * *

I must admit the Thanes it has been my misfortune to encounter on the contemporary stage had persuaded me of the rightness of Hazlitt's contention—until mine was the good fortune to see Mr. Evans in the part last night. For Macbeth presents crueller challenges than Hamlet, if for no other reason than that he must be Hamlet and Fortinbras and Claudius at one and the same time. Macbeth is no simple nature. He is a host of incompatibles—poet and murderer, dreamer and doer, warrior and philosopher, Bellona's bridegroom and the midget who sits on his wife's knee, Napoleon and Judd Gray, Chanticleer and Milquetoast, Shelley and Himmler. But last night, if I did not see Macbeth himself acted to my complete satisfaction, I did at least see the part better realized than I had ever expected to see it done. And from my own point of view I did at last witness the play itself when it was being "properly" performed.

When it comes to Shakespeare, Miss Webster is a genius. More than any other person who has set him behind the footlights in our day (if one except Orson Welles' brilliant work in the modern-dress Julius Caesar) she has the gift for making audiences forget the fact that the great William was ever a schoolroom assignment.

She may take her chances—some pre-eminently successful, some questionable — but Miss Webster approaches Shakespeare creatively. In other words, she refuses to treat him as a classic—at least a dead one. To her, although Shakespeare is a playwright who could sing superlatively well, he is, above all, a man who knew his medium and could tell a horror story with uncanny skill. Miss Webster is not ashamed to make his melodramatic plots exciting. She knows Shakespeare did not share Maxwell Anderson's reticence when it comes to tension. Her eye is vigilently trained on all those telling bits of business which can emphasize unsuspected character values and make old scenes seem contemporary. Watch her when she has Macbeth and Lady Macbeth burn Macbeth's letter to hide their guilt, and you realize how brilliant is her touch. A few of her audacities, such as turning the second meeting with the witches into a dream of Macbeth's, may disturb some Bardolaters. But I must admit I found her direction to be wonderfully invigorating in the majority of instances.

* * *

If one excepts Harry Irvine's Duncan, which is just one jump from a Salvation Army Santa Claus, most of the secondary parts are adroitly handled. The Malcolm of Ralph Clanton, the Banquo of Staats Cotsworth, the Ross of Henry Brandon and the three witches stand out from a cast which is unusually gifted in speaking Shakespeare's lines and underscoring the tension of his plotting.

Judith Anderson's Lady Macbeth is a magnificent performance. Even when she played Gertrude to Mr. Gielgud's Hamlet, Miss Anderson was acting the part. Now she projects it with a sulphurous villainy and an imagination unequaled by any of the Lady Macbeths of our time. She brings out its pathos, too. In the letter scene, in her revulsion at the bloody moment when she has slaughtered the grooms, and in the banquet she is uncommonly fine. But her Sleeping-Walking scene is a masterpiece of invention and suspense; the kind of triumph only a truly remarkable actress could score.

Mr. Evans may not resemble a general as Macbeth, but he is a capable major. He is an intellectual Macbeth; a man of conscience capable of thinking and saying what Mr. Merivale and Mr. Harding only evoked. His is a performance, moreover, which—in spite of what it may leave to be desired in the way of physical prowess—shows once again how extraordinary a player Mr. Evans is. His Thane bears no resemblance—bodily, vocally or spiritually—to his Hamlet, his Richard II, his Romeo or his Falstaff. It is a new creation, slow in starting but deeply passionate, highly uxorious, exciting in its murder scenes, effective at the banquet, admirable in its second meeting with the witches, very fine in its delivery of "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," heartbreaking when robbed by Macduff of its belief in the prophecy of the three weird sisters and spirited in its final duel, when Miss Webster sends him plunging over the parapet.

Mr. Engel's incidental music adds to the driving sweep of the evening's actions, and Mrs. Ayer's costumes create a proper illusion although Mr. Love's settings are often undistinguished in design and execution, they keep the play moving as it has not moved in our day. By all odds this is the most successful production of Macbeth our contemporary theatre has known.

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," *November 12, 1941*

Lady's Night at Glamis Castle

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF, AS I have been told, *Macbeth* has never been successful on Broadway, it should be this time. One may quarrel in places with last night's production, and question it in others, but one can only be caught up and excited by the things as a whole. Much of what makes it vivid and exciting must, of course, be credited to the acting of Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson. But under Margaret Webster's direction, *Macbeth*—like the other works of Shakespeare she has staged—has meaning and clarity and cumulative force—and comes through vigorously as theater.

Her *Macbeth* is certainly not as brilliant, or overwhelming as was, say, her uncut *Hamlet*. For the most part, indeed, it is a very traditional production, with no important technical surprises. It has merely been cleared of cobwebs and given unusual forthrightness and considerable drive. The two main characters stand out dominatingly; the poetry is given its full weight; but neither is allowed to consume or obscure the action. The astonishing rapidity which Shakespeare gave to the earlier parts of the play is captured in the playing, and though the monstrous horror of the aftermath is—with one magnificent exception—not so fully achieved, there is no letdown in the play's movement.

The all-too familiar reasons for *Macbeth's* failure to succeed easily with audiences doubtless have point. Unlike Hamlet and Othello and Lear, Macbeth and his consort are the perpetrators of their own misfortune rather than tragic victims. Unlike them, too, theirs are neither noble nor sympathetic natures. Even their fault—ruthless ambition that stops at nothing—is not an easily pardonable one. Yet in terms of passionate intensity and of towering force of character, this tragedy of two people who, though they may suffer and break from remorse, are "too great to repent," has a dramatic grandeur that nothing can withstand.

And on these two people, so welded by ambition, so unlike in character, the play, of course, must stand or fall. Mr. Evans's Macbeth seems to me in many respects better than his Hamlet, which I did not like. He has communicated that violence of imagination which keeps flooding Macbeth's mind with horror; he has conveyed the desperate cruelty and some of the awful disillusion. The stronger side of Macbeth's nature, that had made him a great soldier and that, in spite of everything, kept him strangely indomitable, I think he has missed. Possible the two sides cannot be easily expressed in the theater—one or the other must dominate; more likely Mr. Evans has offered the interpretation that best suits his talents. Even that interpretation does not go as deep as it might. Mr. Evans always remains as much a rhetorician as an actor; he always reads his lines with a greater sense of their poetic than of their psychological value. Too often, too, he seems to be saying "This is Shakespeare," and even, a little, to be dissociating himself from a scene—to be more directly in contact with the audience than with the other characters on the stage. But there can be no question that his performance, whether or not it builds, "carries" splendidly.

Miss Anderson's Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, always sought to express character and be completely dramatic. In some of the earlier scenes it was at times too dramatic; the effort to maintain the grand manner resulted in moments of palpable overacting. But Miss Anderson was effective in the banqueting scene, and amid all the hazards of the sleep-walking scene, she clearly triumphed. She made the scene an experience: the high, choked, cracked voice; the bold, chilling use of the "bloody" hands; the sick, tottering, somnambulistic steps were indeed a terrifying exemplification of a "mind diseased."

Some members of the cast seemed too slight for their parts. But Staats Cotsworth made a competent Banquo, Viola Keats an attractive Lady Macduff and Herbert Rudley an excellent Macduff. Miss Webster's direction, always vigorous and firm, was particularly skilled in its handling of such a tough problem as that of the witches.

"Macbeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 12, 1941*

'Macbeth,' With Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson, Opens at the National

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE royal progress of Maurice Evans through the tragedies of Shakespeare was continued last evening at the National Theater, where Mr. Evans played Macbeth with great intelligence and some fire. Opposite him in the blood and thunder of the violent tragedy, Judith Anderson played Lady Macbeth with great beauty and all the fire and emotion that even Shakespeare himself could have imagined. Theirs is an impressive production of "Macbeth," and sometimes an exciting one.

It may lack something of the vigor which Miss Margaret Webster, who directed this new production as she has the others in which Mr. Evans has appeared, has before now got into her stagings. In recent years, Miss Webster has helped make Shakespearean drama again what it should always be—a roaring stream through the theater, leaping and sparkling under the lights. She has made it turbulent and rich on the stage, and in the past more turbulent and colorful than she has made "Macbeth." This time, seeking to capture the rigors of the Scottish scene, she has allowed Samuel Leve to design settings which are dignified, but cold almost to the point of austerity. She has muted the pageantry, and permitted Lemuel Ayers to design his costumes in comparative homespun.

This is appropriate, but not as showy as it might be. And perhaps such bloody melodramas as "Macbeth" really are at their best when they are also showy. The new "Macbeth" is impressive. There is movement in it, although perhaps not quite enough. It achieves often the suitable gloomy grandeur, but only now and then does it either chill or heat the blood.

Mr. Evans's performance is intellectually brilliant; both the thought and the beauty of the lines are vivid in his readings. But rather often, it seems to me, they are in a too real sense "readings." There is a rugged violence in the dark and bloody hero of the drama, this haunted murderer, which Mr. Evans's subtle acting does not always reveal. There is a harshness and what amounts to an emotional hysteria, with which the delicate perceptions of an actor so brilliant in portraying the introspective Hamlet do not fully accord. Mr. Evans's is a mental, rather than an emotional, Macbeth. It is best in the necessary violence of the later scenes; weakest when famous speeches are to be, and are, intelligently recited.

Miss Anderson's Lady Macbeth has no flaws of which I am aware, or expect ever to be convinced. In voice and movement, in the slow disintegration of character and hope which it reveals through the disintegration of a woman's face, it is amazingly good. Her sleep-walking scene is shakingly convincing—not graceful floating, but ugly truth. The harsh rubbing of her extended hands as she seeks to cleanse them, the cataleptic movements through which she relives the horrid past form bitter pictures which it will be hard ever to forget.

The members of the supporting cast play with that high skill upon which Miss Webster evidently insists when she is directing the scenery seems cluttered in the way of the play's easiest and swiftest movement.

The chief trouble, of course, is in Mr. Evans' performance. The qualities which brought immediate acclaim to his Richard and his Hamlet, were his intelligence, his sensitiveness, and his literate accuracy in reading the lines.

The fact that the two characters are similar, both weak and vacillating, suggests reasons why his subtle illumination of them appealed strongly to modern audiences. His Falstaff was a tour de force.

Without in the least minimizing such performances it is fair to point out that the actor capable of them is not necessarily capable of Macbeth, or Othello, or Lear. Macbeth, of course, is a smaller assignment than Hamlet, but since it demands different qualities there is no reason to suppose that the same actor can do both equally well.

Though I have seen six or seven Macbeths in my time on the aisle I do not recall an altogether good one. In the celebrated cases of Edwin Booth and Henry Irving, the records indicate that they modified the character to suit their own limitations. In Booth's case to the extent of making Macbeth rather gentle.

But Mr. Evans has, I fear, tried to blow up his powers to fit the storminess and melodramatic scale of the occasion, and so gives the effect of strain and desperate emptiness. The modulated precision of his speech swings under pressure dangerously towards noisy ranting, and his physical presence and intellectual authority seemed dwarfed in the violence of the action.

Only in the collapse after the murder, and in the terror and madness of the scene with Banquo's ghost did Mr. Evans seem to wring the full meaning out of the text, and to give it the wrenching force of his best work.

And in both instances, it should be pointed out, the scenes rely chiefly on the intellectual and spiritual power which Mr. Evans's previous work has demonstrated so well.

For the rest Macbeth seemed outside his compass. He scarcely suggested the gnawing ambition of a growing tyrant, nor exactly a weak subservience to his murderous wife. By her direction of one scene Miss Webster suggests that his meeting with the witches was the vision of a distorted and remorse-racked mind, but Mr. Evans does not sustain the impression of overwhelming mental tension.

As Lady Macbeth Judith Anderson brought off some of the scenes superbly, and in others, notably in trying to save Macbeth's face at the banquet, she was defeated by Mr. Leve's impossible setting. Her reading of the letter had some effective points, and wound up rather melodramatically. The sleep walking scene, again distracted by the structure of the set, was not quite trance-like enough for pitiable anguish, but powerfully done.

Of the others I thought only Staats Cotsworth's Banquo really measured up to the ordinary requirements. Miss Webster's direction is as inventive as ever in details, and now and then picturesque. The last two scenes seemed merely scrambles, and the final duel unlike the catlike brilliance of Hamlet's, almost foolish in its lack of tension, swift and deadly movement, and general design. It seemed more like a couple of the unexcited boys waving butter knives than the mortal climax of a momentous melodrama.

Mr. Leve's free-handed use of an outdoor set for indoor scenes might do well enough if Macbeth's castle had been a Mediterranean villa, but as it is it takes Banquo's remark that "the air is delicate" somewhat too literally. The stairway to the murder chamber is badly placed, both dramatically and visually, and the hired assassins seem to lurk in the doghouse where they ought to have plenty of company.

'MACBETH'

Shakespeare's tragedy, arranged in two acts; staged by Margaret Webster; scenery by Samuel Leve; costumes by Lemuel Ayers; incidental music by Lehman Engel; produced by Maurice Evans in association with John Haggott at the National Theater on November 11, 1941. The cast:

First Witch	Grace Coppin
Second Witch	Abby Lewis
Third Witch	William Hansen
Duncan	Harry Irvine
Malcolm	Ralph Clanton
Donalbain	William Nichols
Menteith	Ernest Graves
Angus	Philip Huston
Lennox	Erford Gage
Caithness	Walter Williams
Fleance	Alex Courtnay
Sergeant	John Ireland
Ross	Henry Brandon
Macbeth	Maurice Evans
Banquo	Staats Cotsworth
Lady Macbeth	Judith Anderson
A Messenger	John Straub
Seyton	Irving Morrow
A Porter	William Hansen
Macduff	Herbert Rudley
An Old Man	John Parrish
A Page	Jackie Ayers
First Murderer	John Ireland
Second Murderer	John Straub
Attendant	Ada McFarland
Lady Macduff	Viola Keats
Boy	Richard Tyler
A Doctor	Harry Irvine
A Waiting Gentlewoman	Grace Coppin
A Young Soldier	Alex Courtnay
Siward	John Parrish

Shakespeare, and which she almost incredibly gets. Herbert Rudley's Macduff is, particularly in the scene when he hears of the murder of his family, brilliantly good. Staats Cotsworth's Banquo is admirably dignified and moving; Harry Irvine's Duncan, although bearded, is articulate and stately. The murderers are villainous and the witches, who cast jagged shadows about them, are evil.

Whatever minor objections may be entered, here again is superlatively presented Shakespeare, tragedy to be attended not as a duty, but as a delight.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 12, 1941*

'Macbeth' Presented at National Theatre

By JOHN ANDERSON

SINCE Maurice Evans and his director Margaret Webster, seem to be in charge of Shakespeare at the moment, it may be assumed that they can do no wrong. They did so handsomely by him in "Hamlet," "Richard II," and "Henry IV" that I, among many others, burst the buttons off my vocabulary in cheering their achievement. But their "Macbeth," presented last night at the National, seemed to be in no way worthy of its predecessors, seemed, in fact, to be dull and listless and wholly lacking in the force needed to drive its lunging melodrama across the stage. Not only is the central performance weak, but the general pace is slow and

"Macbeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 12, 1941*

Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson Appear in "Macbeth"

By WILELLA WALDORF

MAURICE EVANS, who has appeared on Broadway in seasons past as Romeo, Richard II, Falstaff, Hamlet and Malvolio, gave us a new production of "Macbeth" last night at the National Theatre. Again Margaret Webster is the director. And as his Lady Macbeth Mr. Evans shares the spotlight with Judith Anderson, who has played the role at London's Old Vic, but never before in New York.

Since Mr. Evans and Miss Webster electrified Broadway with the little-known "Richard II" back in 1937, they have occupied a pre-eminent position as Shakespearean interpreters in this country. Their unabridged "Hamlet" maintained that high standard, and Mr. Evans then proceeded to demonstrate his remarkable versatility as a character actor by playing a capital Falstaff in "Henry IV."

Last year's "Twelfth Night," though directed by the redoubtable Miss Webster, with Mr. Evans doing Malvolio to Helen Hayes' Viola, was less impressive and may be set down as a minor bit of fooling that did not seriously interrupt the major business of Evans, Webster and Company, which is producing the Bard's works with spirit, clarity and understanding.

A Beautiful Production

It is difficult, looking back, to compare the new "Macbeth" with such productions as "Richard II" and the full-length "Hamlet," for "Richard," after all, came as a novel and exciting experience when it burst upon the town nearly five years ago, and the Evans "Hamlet" was something few of us will soon forget. The actor-manager's playing, and Miss Webster's directing technique, are no longer novelties. To those who have never encountered the combine at work before, "Macbeth" is sure to come as a revelation. For those of us who have followed it from the beginning, the current production ranks somewhere just below "Richard" and "Hamlet" and far above "Twelfth Night."

The magnificent color and movement so characteristic of Miss Webster's best work is again in evidence at the National. The rugged background of eleventh century Scotland is sturdily suggested in Samuel Leve's settings, which are nevertheless arranged for quick shifts of scene, while Lemuel Ayers' costuming is unfailingly beautiful in design, coloring and texture, much of it suggesting the plaids of Scottish clans in somewhat subdued fashion. Lehman Engel's music, too, lends atmosphere to the performance, as does the off-stage moaning of the wind over the moors and a judicious use of loud-speaker effects from time to time.

The company as a whole is on a par with past Evans productions, and some of the casting indicates that Miss Webster has again managed to discover a number of hitherto uncelebrated but very capable Shakespearean actors for Broadway.

A Magnificent Lady Macbeth

Most notable of the performances is that of Miss Anderson as Lady Macbeth, a part that, in competent hands, almost always towers over that of Macbeth himself. Since "Family Portrait," Judith Anderson has been registered in this department's books as an actress of unusual gifts—before that she had her ups and her downs. Last night she gave one of the finest performances we have ever seen in any of the Bard's famous roles. Her Lady Macbeth is uncommonly effective throughout the play. The early appearances, urging Macbeth on to murder, are brilliantly done; the sleeping walking scene beautifully thought out. So tight a grip had she on her audience during this final scene that every sufferer from croup and whooping cough in the house remained silent until it was over.

The Evans Macbeth

Mr. Evans' Macbeth is a worthy portrayal to add to his already extensive Broadway gallery, and one marvels again at the completeness with which he identifies himself with each new role, from Romeo to Falstaff, from the Dauphin in "St. Joan" to Napoleon, Hamlet and now, Macbeth.

As one who has followed Mr. Evans' notable career with keen interest and admiration since he first came to this country to act with Katharine Cornell, we must now sound a note of warning. It seems to us that Mr. Evans is developing an unfortunate tendency to mouth his words, to over-stress his consonants, to force his voice. He has from the first been threatened with this fault, and it is growing on him alarmingly, possibly because of the great amount of touring he has done, and his natural wish to make himself heard, and understood, in all parts of those enormous tabernacles one is forced to play in on the road.

Whatever it is that has over-developed this fault in Mr. Evans' playing, let us hope he will take steps to correct it before it becomes a definite menace. He is too fine an actor to permit a minor, but disturbing, mannerism to mar the natural beauty of his speech. Mr. Evans has a facility for illuminating some of the most obscure of Shakespeare's speeches. Last night our interest in what Macbeth was saying was sometimes disturbed by the way in which he said it.

Nevertheless, the new "Macbeth" is something to see, and to hear, a must for playgoers who pride themselves on getting around each season to the better things in the theatre.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 12, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Macbeth"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NONE of the assorted "Macbeths" this courier has seen rank with the performance led by Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson at the National last evening. As directed by the energetic Margaret Webster, it is brimming over with the horrors and monstrosities of Shakespeare's text, and Mr. Evans and Miss Anderson play with consuming passion. Although every schoolboy knows "Macbeth," playgoers seldom make its acquaintance on the stage, for it is an unwieldy and ill-proportioned drama that refuses to make peace with the modern theatre. And even in this rational and thorough staging "Macbeth" compares unfavorably with the Evans "Hamlet," "Richard II" and "Henry IV," all of which are better suited to representational theatre.

• • •

But there are some most foul and unnatural horrors in "Macbeth," especially in the first act, when Shakespeare was writing with Elizabethan sensationalism; and there is nothing much more shocking in the theatre than the plot of the Macbeths to murder the sovereign guest in their castle. These scenes could not be acted with more excitement. Lady Macbeth's evil plotting, Macbeth's wild resolution to go through with a deed that revolts him, his shattered remorse when he returns with the bloody daggers, Lady Macbeth's cool entrance into the murder chamber to complete the false picture of betrayal and her faltering return after she has looked on horrors, her hands bathed in blood—this is the dramatic climax in "Macbeth," and it is vividly acted.

For Mr. Evans and Miss Anderson are well matched in this play. They are not a team of conspirators. They are united by something deeper than mutual advantage, and the crimes they spatter across the face of Scotland are sensual as well as political. Mr. Evans's clarity of mind and speech make Macbeth's character a lucid portrait of man in process of disintegration from the poise of nobility to the weakness of remorse and the confusion of defeat. Miss Anderson's Lady Macbeth is her most distinguished work in our theatre. It has a sculptured beauty in the early scenes, and a resolution that seems to be fiercer than the body that contains it. It is strong without being inhuman. And she has translated the sleep-walking scene into something memorable; the nervous washing of the hands is almost too frightful to be watched. Strange images of death haunt the magnificent acting of Mr. Evans and Miss Anderson in these macabre scenes.

• • •

As a drama, "Macbeth" contains a lot of undergrowth that has to be kicked out of the way before the biting scenes can be played. Although Miss Webster kicks it out of the way, the effort is apparent. Sometimes the rush of warriors is hollow motion, and short scenes essential to the narrative are not always vital parts of the drama. Apart from the hideous sounds that twice came out of a mechanical voice amplifier, the witches' scenes are staged and acted with remarkable versatility—visually horrific, yet representative of destiny rather than the occult.

The play is well cast. Staats Cotsworth, who plays Banquo, is an actor of unusual intelligence and force; he can create character without describing it. As Macduff, Herbert Rudley is excellent also; and Harry Irvine's venerable Duncan is a creditable piece of work. Although a literal representation of "Macbeth" requires a heavy production, Samuel Leve has contrived to design a full suit of settings in baleful tones of color, Lemuel Ayres has designed the costumes in a somber key, and, it is reported, out of cotton materials ingeniously woven and blended. To provide an evocative musical accompaniment, Lehman Engel has composed another good incidental score.

• • •

When Shakespeare has given the actors vigorous material to work with, this "Macbeth" is compact with excitement. Mr. Evans and Miss Anderson spread a flame of acting over the highly wrought scenes. But it must be confessed that "Macbeth" as a whole is hard to adapt to the orderly rhythm of the modern theatre, and the most vivid parts of it are the central portions of the play.

"Macbeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 12, 1941*

Maurice Evans Revives 'Macbeth,' Judith Anderson as Her Ladyship

"Macbeth," tragedy by William Shakespeare. Revived by Maurice Evans at the National Theatre, New York, Nov. 11, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU might meet a man who would argue that this is no year in which to revive one of the gorier of the Shakespearean tragedies. If you did and were to take him to the National Theatre to see the Maurice Evans revival of "Macbeth," he would be pretty sure to admit that so long as it had to be done, it were better that it be done the Evans way than any other.

Here is the most coherent of such "Macbeth" revivals as I recall, and the most impressive because of its coherency. Usually, as you will probably remember with a few shivers, "Macbeth" is a bloody business in which sound and fury figure outside as well as inside the text.

Margaret Webster has taken the script, however, arranged it in two acts and 19 scenes, and made it possible to carry the story through from the first meeting with the weird sisters to the last stab of Macduff's itching and revengeful sword with a minimum of theatrical fustian and in no more than two hours and a half.

For which achievement many thanks.

Youth and Vigor Help

That Mr. Evans would prove an impressive Macbeth was certain. No actor of our time is more complete master of vocal sounds than he, and when it comes to fury he can roar you a defiant scene or fight you a flashing duel with the best of them.

He is not a tired old actor, as most of our Macbeths have been. He is a young man in his vigorous thirties. And while he is not by temperament entirely suited to the ferociousness that is necessary to carry the Macbeth program through, once he is reluctantly started and held to the sticking place by her ambitious ladyship's urging, he is so good an actor, and so earnest, that he is able to assume a ferocity that entirely serves the purpose.

Miss Webster does not permit her players to stir any doubt in your mind that the conspiracy to murder the gentle Duncan, and thereafter to clear the way for Macbeth to attain the crown, had been brewed, if not plotted, months before the tragedy begins.

Murder, Inc.

This was no sudden inspiration, whipped up in an envious soldier's mind by the garrulous old crones. Macbeth had something of the sort in mind, and it was one of Lady Macbeth's fixed passions, long before we meet them.

Therefore you are not asked to even ponder the suggestion that the Macbeths were really nice folk, except for their vaulting political ambitions. They were dastards, both, and conscienceless.

They did not like either the sight or smell of blood, but they could take it, and did, with evident satisfaction, until their pasts caught up with them.

And that is the way the co-stars play it for you. The witches give Macbeth the green light, as you might say, and he rushes home to tell mama about it. She, having had his letter, is already quite excited by the possibilities of the situation. And so they start.

Evans is inspiring in the soliloquies, topping his evening's work with the sound and fury conclusion. He is always a striking picture in the Lemuel Ayers costumes, which are modest, but always in character. He is tender with his lady wife, which is more than she deserved, but commanding with his soldiers, and it is not an easy transition for one of his stature.

Helpful Scenes

Miss Anderson, from her belief in Lady Macbeth as a she-devil only slightly camouflaged, arouses an honest hatred from her first scene and never varies the pattern until she softens under the influence of sleep and the delirium of the hand-washing, which are well done. Hers is a consistently hateful characterization, and therefore entirely to her credit.

As usual, the one ray of pity that Shakespeare permitted, the tragedy of the Macduff family murder, won the most spontaneous of the evening's rewarding applause. Herbert Rudley was fully equal to that situation.

Staats Cotsworth was a reasonable Banquo, Harry Irvine doubled Duncan and the Doctor, Grace Coppin led the witches and the others gave earnest support in the shorter parts.

Samuel Leve has done well with the settings, helping to keep the picture always clear. The changes are quietly made, the waits short. Lehman Engel has furnished a nicely subdued musical accompaniment and Miss Webster has fused the whole with a very real artistry.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 12, 1941*

Death in Scotland

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE black and gory melodrama that is Shakespeare's "Macbeth" is presented with all its hearty and colorful violence intact in this striking new production. That and Miss Judith Anderson's thrilling performance of Lady Macbeth are the chief news of a rewarding evening in the theater in the company of those eminent Shakespeareans, Maurice Evans and Miss Margaret Webster. Although this is not one of Mr. Evans's most completely satisfying portrayals nor Miss Webster's most brilliant staging, the current presentation has the great and beautiful virtue of being alive, vigorous, and eloquent, and so, despite a few minor objections that I have here and there, I would say that this is the finest production of "Macbeth" in the modern American theatre.

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The curious thing about the new "Macbeth" is it combines the melodramatic violence with the brooding eloquence of the play in the shrewdest and most satisfactory almagamation of those necessary Shakespearean virtues that our stage has seen at least within a decade, and yet in this production there is the astonishing fact that this classic work is not quite the intensely moving and heartbreaking tragedy which it should be. Somehow it is the hearty excitement of its murder tale, and not the deep and bitter compassion of its probing into the blackness of tortured souls, which provides the most striking feature of the Evans-Webster production. Yet the haunting poetry of its superb lines is almost invariably managed with an expertness which loses none of the beauty of the incomparable Shakespearean words.

Of Miss Anderson's work it would be difficult to express too great an enthusiasm. Her Lady Macbeth is proud, ambitious, imperious, ruthless, deeply loving and deeply suffering, but always completely human. It is clear that, when she does break, it is at the sight of her husband's weakness rather than through any deep sense of sin on her own part. It is a beautifully rounded and immensely effective portrayal, which combines eloquence with a fine and complete dramatic sense. Her handling of the sleep-walking scene, incidentally, is nothing short of magnificent, bringing to a climax a characterization of unusual distinction and remarkable style. It is something of a feat to be better in a Shakespearean play than Mr. Evans is, but I think Miss Anderson achieves it.

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Mr. Evans's talent for combining in his characterizations both the lyric beauty and the dramatic insight of Shakespeare by no means deserts him in his playing of Macbeth, and his is an excellent characterization. The one objection which I have to his portrayal is that there is a strangely synthetic air about his interpretation of the bloody Thane. There is a little bit of his Hamlet and a little bit of his Richard II in his characterization, and, although it may be said with justice that Shakespeare made Macbeth something of both those unhappy princes, Mr. Evans sometimes fails to combine them into a completely rounded person. There are traces of weakness in the tortured murderer which occasionally seem weaknesses of portrayal rather than an intended part of a portrayal of weakness. Yet much of the time he is properly brilliant and he handles the "To-morrow and to-morrow" speech with true magnificence. Most of the other players are satisfactory and the settings, save in the banquet scene, are effective. Here, anyway, is the finest "Macbeth" of our time.

"Theatre"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 13, 1941*

'Theatre,' Inconsequential Comedy, Opens at the Hudson Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A RATHER pretty little puppet show called "Theatre," starring Cornelia Otis Skinner in the role of a great actress, was played out last evening at the Hudson. It is the work of Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham, and is related by dilution to Mr. Maugham's novel of the same title. It has neat, small turns of phrase and is transparently conventional in all its attitudes. And it is difficult to feel toward it any emotion more violent than benevolent neutrality.

It tells of Julia Lambert, who is a very great English actress fallen on her middle years. She and Michael Gosselyn are, as the world imagines, a devoted team of actors, their love authorized by marriage. The world does not know, alas, that they have been divorced these several years, and are living platonically together for reasons of business and friendship. With their lives thus complicated and incomplete, neither is content. He showers ermine coats on young women; she seeks reassurance in the arms of a brassy young man who exploits her devotion.

They fly apart entirely in the second act. He goes yachting with a lady of great wealth. She, turning her back on romance, goes bravely on alone, producing single-handed a play called "Lola Montes," and not quitting even when the going is rough. Because the play must go on, must it not? The theater is in the blood of every one, isn't it? Actors still smile and smile, although their personal hearts are breaking, and there is a glamour about the stage which will never die. Upstart actresses are still to be up-staged by their discerning elders; old doormen bask sentimentally in the glory of the theater, and remember what Sir Henry Irving said before he died.

It is a pretty picture, and you may be sure that it ends prettily—ends, in short, precisely as you knew it would end five minutes after the curtain had risen on the first act. Mr. Bolton and Mr. Maugham, as they mellow the latter's book, try no innovations. They write pleasantly, everybody plays pleasantly. And the result is a comedy which, painlessly, goes in one ear and out the other.

Miss Skinner is ornamental and assured, and often expert, in her portrayal of Julia. Now and then one may catch glimpses of the method she acquired during her brilliant career as a solo entertainer, but on the whole she plays the authors' superficial character charmingly. Arthur Margetson is equally successful with the role of Michael; Frederick Bradlee has several telling scenes as the young son of the beloved couple, and the others in the cast—notably Viola Roache—add useful mites to the inconsequential, forgettable and only mildly amusing proceedings.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 13, 1941*

Cornelia Skinner Has a Fling at the 3-Act Story Drama

"Theatre," comedy by Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham. Produced by John Golden at the Hudson Theatre, New York, Nov. 12, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is no more social significance attaching to the new play at the Hudson, which makes a full-length actress of Cornelia Otis Skinner, than is found in the title.

"Theatre" it is called, after the Somerset Maugham novel from which Guy Bolton chiseled it, and it is a modern adaptation of the story drama that flourished long before phobias and neuroses ever broke into print.

It is about as sure of favor, I think, as such ventures can be for two good business reasons:

One, because Miss Skinner commands a passionately devoted monodrama following.

Two, because there is a considerable playgoing public that has been resentfully waiting, if my mail is any criterion, for just such a return to this type of story drama.

Possible Objectors

Of course there will be two groups that will cause Producer John Golden some anxiety:

One, those among Miss Skinner's friends who will insist that Cornelia never could have been THAT kind of an actress (meaning the kind Mr. Maugham started and Mr. Bolton finished).

And, two, those among Mr. Golden's equally devoted "clean" play clientele who will want to know how come he is producing a play in which the heroine deilberately adventures in sin for the salvation of her ego.

Miss Skinner took the hurdle of playing THAT kind of an actress beautifully and boldly. If you did not entirely believe what she was pretending, you were lost in admiration of the skill and assurance with which she pretended.

As the evening wore on and the play approached its more important crises (that of the lightly guilty mother who faces her suspicious son, and that in which the great actress swoons and completely fools her theatre-wise husband in her effort to recapture his affection) she was able to hold her audience at attention and move it to a sympathetic response.

Mr. Bolton has taken liberties with Mr. Maugham's somewhat bitter and incisively ironic theatre comedy. His treatment, which probably was ordered, is less true to the theatre and the people of the theatre than it is to the older play-building conventions.

On the Obvious Side

What he has used is the frankly obvious story of the middle-aged actress holding desperately to her youth and the glamour that has made her a popular favorite.

Sensing a loss of sex appeal she adventures in a closed market in the hope that she will find reassurance satisfying. She does not go so far as the disillusioning street-walker episode of the book; only so far as the affair with Tom Fennell, and that is not too convincing.

Of the Julia who bitterly concluded in the book that "We (the actors) are the symbols of all this confused aimless struggling that they call life, and it's only the symbol that is real," there is precious little left.

Performances and production are satisfying. Arthur Margetson has, at long last, a fairly decent part as Julia's handsome husband and co-star. Helen Flint plays a Dolly de Vries who has been industriously cleaned up by Mr. Bolton.

Frederick Bradlee does splendidly with the role of the son, there are nice bits by Viola Roache and Stanley Harrison, and Jane Gordon, John Moore and Francis Compton fill in acceptably. Nice settings by Oenslager, direction by Mr. Golden.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 13, 1941

'Theatre' Is as Theater Does

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THEATRE makes you rub your eyes and wonder whether the years have really scampered by. It takes you back to the '20s, when plays were so frightfully sophisticated—or perhaps it's just that audiences weren't. It recalls all the wit those plays attempted and all the smut they achieved; and it mates its drawing-room smartness to that no less familiar staple—the romance and glamor of the theater.

It's an always shrewd combination, and it doesn't hurt a bit that Cornelia Otis Skinner graces it with her versatile acting and effective stage presence. And so far as keeping in motion goes, *Theatre* slides along as smoothly as a car on a track. There's never an uncertain moment in this well greased tale of a great actress who has reached the age where she's afraid she has lost her sex appeal and fastens on a young man to find out. This, with husband complications, suffices for two acts, and for the third there's a thick slice of the aforementioned glamor.

I need hardly point out that the whole thing is just shiny hokum, but it might be worth adding that most of it's shiny from age. The authors haven't passed up a thing they found in the cupboard: they try for a laugh by mentioning the water closet; they try for a tear by telling how gallantly Sir Henry Irving died with his grease-paint on; they virtually go robbing Oscar Wilde's grave with tired epigrams like "One half the world delights in slander, the other half in believing it." I found all this easier to take, however, than the smirks and double-entendres and showy remarks about sex that were often vulgar beneath their veneer, and seldom amusing.

Miss Skinner is much the greatest justification that *Theatre* has; she plays a not too attractive woman with skill and animation and wit. Nobody else in the cast fought his way clear of the play's rather unpleasant atmosphere, though Donald Oenslager's sets were redeeming.

"Theatre"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 13, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Theatre"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Cornelia Otis Skinner has presided over one-woman theatre performances for years, she has never presided over a full-length drama in New York until now. She is starred in "Theatre," which opened at the Hudson last evening. It is a comedy by Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham, suggested by a novel of the same title that Mr. Maugham published a season or two ago, although people who can read say that the play and the novel are remarkably dissimilar.

"Theatre" is a conventional story about acting temperament and the excitements of backstage, an example of what H. L. Stuart used to describe as the "sin and sachet school of drama." As a spiteful-tongued London actress Miss Skinner is extravagantly beautiful, and the play is handsomely produced. Last evening's audience appeared to be pleasantly entertained with both, although this department is obliged to confess that it felt more than surfeited with hokum before the curtain descended.

* * *

Mr. Bolton and Mr. Maugham have put together a genre piece about London's most popular pair of actors. London delights in their acting and takes vast pleasure in imagining that they are happily and devotedly married. As a matter of fact, they were secretly divorced a number of years ago and occupy the same house only for business reasons. "Theatre" is the story of how their philanderings draw them away from each other and how the theatre draws them together again. As a test of sex appeal, she plunges into a garish affair with a boyish accountant, and he retires from the theatre and goes yachting with an amorous lady of wealth. Is this a permanent separation? Can a popular actor leave the stage for good and see another actor step into his shoes and receive all the plaudits? Is there a Santa Claus?

* * *

Since the authors of "Theatre" have superior taste, you can depend upon their comedy for some good scenes along the way. When the comedy opens the actor and the actress are discovered in a wryly amusing argument about the suitability of letting her play Lola Montez at a tender age. There are patches of skillfully bitter duologues here and there and some touching scenes between the actress and her adolescent son. But once a pair of authors lay down the premises of a comedy like "Theatre" they are bound to do the whole jog-trot of serial-story gaudiness, including back-stage on the opening night and dressing-room amenities. Mr. Bolton and Mr. Maugham have obediently circled the track. Their play is a mechanical contrivance, without characterizations or enthusiasm.

* * *

Mr. Golden has seen it well bestowed. Donald Oenslager has designed a gorgeous living-room in Hampstead, two years before the blitz, and a ravishing dressing room, if that adjective is not misleading. Since Miss Skinner is playing an actress who is beginning to have misgivings about her looks, it is a pleasure to observe that she is acting a part beyond her years and outside her personal experience. Beautifully gowned, she plays with extraordinary loveliness; and since she is a wit in her own right, she can neatly cut a malicious line into its component parts. But somewhere in this role there must be a flamboyancy that escapes her, as well as some of the electricity of a footlights hussy.

As the fashionable actor, Arthur Margetson plays with the dry humor and sharp gestures of drawing-room artifice—everything small, tight and precise. Viola Roache acts the loyal personal servant in the proper tradition. In the part of the wealthy temptress Helen Flint is politely treacherous; and Francis Compton is the soul of discretion as Lord Charles Temperley. Frederick Bradlee acts the part of the growing son with tactful awareness of his nuisance value.

"Theatre" is a brilliantly varnished old hackney coach.

'THEATRE'

A comedy in three acts by Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham; staged by John Golden; settings by Donald Oenslager; presented at the Hudson Theater on November 12, 1941, by Mr. Golden. The cast:

Julia Lambert.....Cornelia Otis Skinner
Mr. Purkiss.....Leon Shaw
Evie.....Viola Roache
Michael Gosselyn.....Arthur Margetson
Roger Gosselyn.....Frederick Bradlee
Tom Fennell.....John Moore
Jevons.....J. Colvil Dunn
Dolly de Vries.....Helen Flint
Lord Charles Temperley.....Francis Compton
Avice Crichton.....Jane Gordon
A Stage Manager.....George Spelvin
Sergeant.....Stanley Harrison

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 13, 1941*

Cornelia Otis Skinner Gives Charming Performance

By JOHN MASON BROWN

CORNELIA OTIS SKINNER gave a charming and radiant performance last night in a comedy called Theatre which Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham have retrieved from Mr. Maugham's novel of that name. Although she has won her fame primarily as a monologist, Miss Skinner proved to be as much at home on a stage filled with actors as she is when surrounded by shadows of her own creation.

She faces no easy assignment. The highly fumigated comedy which Mr. Bolton has derived from Mr. Maugham's novel is one of those behind-the-scenes sagas of stardom which deals with the home life of an enchantress described as the greatest actress in England.

Yet all things considered (chief among which is the play itself) Miss Skinner carries off her task triumphantly. She lives down the script's references to herself without causing the embarrassment that comes from doubt. Her beauty and her smiling serenity support the story's point. And she not only demonstrates her uncommon skill as a comedienne but acts with a grace and poise which merited the bravos that were her tribute at the curtain's fall.

* * *

What Miss Skinner expends her high talents upon is a play that is frankly trashy, though not without amusement. It was trashy when Mr. Maugham first wrote it as a novel and is no less trashy, though infinitely and unregrettably more Watch-and-Ward, in its dramatized form. Indeed, if the first act of Theatre is its worst, it is because it seems then to be still frightened by the novel. Thereafter it takes its liberties, and they help rather than hinder.

Theatre, you may remember, was that tale about a famous pair of British actors to which Mr. Maugham turned his extraordinary talents. Mr. Maugham's insistence was that these players only knew reality when they were playing. In the whitewashed stage version at the Hudson what one gets is an account of how two secretly divorced English actors, who are thought of by their public as the Joan and Darby of the English theater, are reunited after each has had a middle-aged affair.

If this narrative begins badly, it betters in its second act, is really amusing in its third, and is never boring throughout. It has its sprinkling of serviceable gags. Its interest grows. Moreover, Mr. Golden has produced it with as much conviction as if it were a masterpiece. He has placed it against some very tasteful backgrounds by Donald Oenslager. And Arthur Margetson as Miss Skinner's husband, Frederick Bradlee as her son, John Moore as her lover, Helen Flint as her rival and Viola Roache as her maid all contribute helpful performances.

But, although I cheerfully admit there are many who will relish it, I must confess that Theatre is not my dish. I become embarrassed by the stage's sentimentalities when they are aired in public. Its truths then seem so false, its credo is so childish, and its memories of say, Sir Henry Irving's death, come across as so valentineish that they do scant justice to the gallantry they are supposed to praise.

Miss Skinner? That's a different question. Her performance I truly enjoyed from the moment she was discovered in her London home to the time she quitted the stage to walk up the aisle at the evening's end. The production is hers, and she makes the most of it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 13, 1941*

Cornelia Otis Skinner Stars in "Theatre" at the Hudson

By WILELLA WALDORF

"THEATRE," the comedy by Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham, presented by John Golden last night at the Hudson Theatre, started out to be a dramatic version of Mr. Maugham's novel of the same title. During its extended pre-Broadway career on the road, however, "Theatre" the play has wandered farther and farther away from "Theatre" the novel. Finally, some time last week, Mr. Golden decided so little of the novel remained that it might be just as well not to mention it in the billing at all.

This was good news indeed, for Mr. Maugham's novel, "Theatre," was very poor stuff, and we had been dreading a stage version that might make some attempt to follow the book.

The only part of the play at the Hudson that is related to the novel is the first act, which is extremely dismal. Fortunately for us all, however, the second act picks up a bit, and the third, laid in the star's dressing room on a first night, will appeal mightily to anybody who is even faintly stage struck. Since Cornelia Otis Skinner plays the role of a celebrated London actress attractively and with as much humor as the script allows, "Theatre" turns out to be a fairly amusing hodge-podge of old-fashioned triangle plot, pseudo-sophisticated chatter, feminine emotionalism and back-stage sentiment.

A Theatre Partnership

Just how much of "Theatre," the play, Somerset Maugham actually wrote is a question. Report has it he collaborated with Mr. Bolton by mail. There are times at the Hudson when it seems as if the script might have been put together by half a dozen people in different cities playing one of those games in which each person adds a line or two without knowing precisely what has gone before. Under the circumstances it is surprising that Miss Skinner and her company are able to achieve any sort of sustained character portrayal, but as the old stage doorman remarks in Act 3, it takes guts to make good in the theatre, and there are apparently plenty of guts back-stage at the Hudson.

Julia Lambert and Michael Gosselyn, actor-managers at the Siddons Theatre in London's West End, are one of England's favorite couples, partners off-stage as well as on. Parents of a seventeen-year-old boy, they are presumed to be happily married, while as a matter of fact they were secretly divorced during their last American tour. Since the British public thinks of them sentimentally as the Darby and Joan of Shaftesbury Avenue, they still occupy the same house for purely business reasons.

Back-Stage Glamour

Mr. Gosselyn's penchant for chippie chasing irks Miss Lambert, who is beginning to worry about growing old and to wonder if she's losing her sex appeal. Wherefore she takes up night-clubbing with a young tax accountant, and her ex-husband is lured away by the millionairess who backs their shows. Much of the play is as trashy as a magazine serial designed for bored ladies to read between chocolate creams, but when it actually moves into the theatre itself some good old-fashioned stage glamour comes to the fore, and even though the dressing room sequence is hackneyed it still has its old appeal, especially with Miss Skinner, no mean trouper herself, to give it spirit and a dash of her own superior brand of humor.

Arthur Margetson plays the actor-manager gracefully, young Frederick Bradlee is convincing as the perplexed son, and there is good character work by Viola Roache, Stanley Harrison and J. Colvil Dunn. Donald Oenslager has set the piece attractively.

Any play that has the nerve to use the word "Theatre" as its title ought to offer something a good deal better than the comedy at the Hudson, but as it is, there's fair entertainment to be had in a grease-painty atmosphere with Miss Skinner always on hand to lend it distinction.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 13, 1941*

'Theatre' Premiere Staged at Hudson

Cornelia Otis Skinner Heads Cast in Stage Version of Maugham Novel

By JOHN ANDERSON

WHEN the theatre gets sentimental about itself and its people it is likely to gush pure unadulterated syrup, usually vanilla, unless it can turn the subject into the comic family brawl of "The Royal Family" or the smart mischief of "The Guardsman."

But "Theatre," the play made by Guy Bolton and Somerset Maugham from Mr. Maugham's novel of the same name, seems to belong in a soda fountain instead of a Broadway playhouse. As handsomely produced by John Golden at the Hudson last night it does afford the lovely and distinguished Cornelia Otis Skinner her first New York stardom and that is occasion for applause and celebration. I only wish she had a play worthier of her talents.

For the Messrs. Bolton and Maugham have laid it on with a sugary trowel in telling the story of Julia Lambert, a London favorite of the stage (the year is safely 1938) who fears that her sex appeal is slipping. Since her secretly divorced husband has been her stage partner for years, they continue living under the same roof, and to all appearances they are a happy theatre couple.

The convenient arrangement makes it easy for her to experiment, and the play is about how she tried her scheme with a young accountant. How her ex-husband got suitably jealous and went off with another woman, and how, in the effulgence of the theatre, he was drawn back to the irresistible footlights to kiss and make-up and live happily ever after.

Nostalgic Trend

Ah, me! We all know how in such cases the play can go hog-wild with nostalgia, and the Messrs. Boltos and Maugham treat us to some rather high stuff. There is the butler whose brother, buttling for a duke, envies him because dukes don't have opening nights, the old meanies.

There is the maid of all bristles protecting the great star from her annoying public, and a stagedoor man tottering out to give us a drenching little talk about what makes a star, and how Sir 'Enry Irving was warned that he would kill himself if he didn't leave the theatre and go 'ome, and how he replied, "This is my home." A lad murmured "Fine stuff," and if I'm not mistaken someone said "The play must go on."

After her triumph Julie leaves the theatre by the front door to avoid the crowd waiting to see her, and this makes it necessary for Miss Skinner to take her final exit over the footlight trough of the Hudson and up an aisle, followed quickly, I may add, by your correspondent. From the tone of the writing, though, I wouldn't have been surprised if she had stopped and patted every sweet little playgoer on the back, or passed around lollipops as an after-play chaser.

General Effect

Most of the characters seem singularly unattractive, and except in the work of Miss Skinner and Mr. Margetson the performances simply heighten that impression. Now and then an amusing line bobs up to make a ripple, but the general effect is pretty tedious.

Miss Skinner, by her very presence, relieves some of the air of stodginess, and her performance is one of true distinction, full of vivacity and fine humor. Mr. Margetson, who seems to take all sorts of parts in his stride, from musical comedy to last year's knockabout, "Charley's Aunt," is, as usual, effective and composed, and unshaken by the lines he had to speak.

I was shaken by them from time to time, which is probably what kept me awake, and left me the pleasure, at least, of admiring Mr. Oenslager's two handsome settings and Miss Skinner's performance.

"Theatre"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 13, 1941*

Stage Life

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MR. MAUGHAM'S novel about an aging actress is freely translated to the stage in the new play which John Golden is presenting at the Hudson Theater.

Although this report of the comedy called "Theater" is set down by a Maugham addict who unfortunately never got around to reading the novel, the chances are that my dereliction makes no difference, since it is confessed by all concerned that the play bears but a distant relationship to the original. What emerges in the dramatized version is the artificial telling of an artificial fable of the joys and sorrows in love and art of a celebrated English couple of the theater. While the result has little connection with sound and distinguished drama, it has a sort of glossy popular magazine quality about it which should give it a distinct audience success.

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In a fashion that seems characteristic of the drama this season "Theater" starts with its weakest act and then proceeds to get better as it goes along. Even at its best, though, it is a pretty mild, brittle and superficial work which tells without much excitement or wit of the rather unexhilarating home life of one of the first families of the theater. Chiefly it is the portrait of Julia Lambert, an eminent star of the pre-war London stage, who fears that she is no longer attractive to men and sets out to prove that she can still be a woman of glamour. It seems that she and her husband, likewise an eminent star, have really been divorced some years before but have kept the fact a secret so as not to disillusion their public. You will hardly be surprised to find that, even though they take lovers and drift apart, the theater manages to bring them together again.

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Although the play is sentimental about the theater, it is not as convincing as it should be about the romance and excitement of the stage as a career. In truth, it is inclined to hint that acting is a passably mild profession and actors are rather dull people, which is certainly not the point that it intended to make. There is a certain amusement to be derived from the conception of the actress as a woman who is so accustomed to turn on her emotions professionally that she always thinks of life in terms of scenes, but on the whole the portrait of the heroine contains little insight or color or excitement. Nevertheless I anticipate popularity for "Theater" because it does contain a certain brittle facility, a certain quiet romantic appeal and a certain suggestion that it is all very sophisticated, smart and polished.

In the all-important leading role Miss Cornelia Otis Skinner looks extremely handsome and plays with dash and humor, even though it is possible that she lacks something of the flashing romantic temperament which the play attributes to the heroine. Arthur Margetson acts the role of the actor husband convincingly enough, and there is helpful work by Miss Helen Flint as the husband's sweetheart, by John Moore as the wife's rather incidental lover, by Stanley Harrison as a stage doorman and by Miss Jane Gordon as a discomfited young actress who foolishly tries to steal a scene from the great Julia Lambert. The best portrayal in the supporting cast, though, is contributed by Frederick Bradlee, who brings real feeling to the role of the star's sensitive son. "Theater" makes the stage a somewhat uneventful institution.

"Spring Again"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 11, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Spring Again"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ANY device for getting Grace George and C. Aubrey Smith on the stage together has this column's full permission. "Spring Again," which was put on at Henry Miller's last evening, is the device offered by Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch, and it will serve. For it presents Miss George as a sweet old lady with a gleaming sense of humor and Mr. Smith as a gruff old curmudgeon with a soft spot in his heart, which are exactly the reasons we have all adored them for years.

Miss Leighton and Mr. Bloch have contrived their comedy by putting separate pieces together more by industry than inspiration. In cases like that the first act is the dull one and the last act the best. Toward the last half of the evening "Spring Again" begins to reward the authors for the trouble they have taken; and to make things better Joseph Buloff walks on as a motion-picture bigwig. Mr. Buloff is one of the funniest comedians in New York. His broad comedy contrasted with the dainty sentiments and crotchets of Miss George and Mr. Smith gives "Spring Again" a cheerful and cosy conclusion that leaves everyone happy.

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You will not be passionately interested in the details of the story: It has to do with an elderly couple who are living in reduced circumstances in two rooms and a bath. When Donald Oenslager has to design rooms for people who have to count their pennies, his heart is really not in their economic problem. What he likes is lavish beauty with colors exquisitely blended and furniture done by the old masters; and if the characters in the play cannot afford it, he and the producer can.

In this instance it is just as well, for the setting is stunning. And although Miss George does have to iron her own handkerchiefs on a desk probably made for King Solomon's head accountant, the character she is playing comes from a once wealthy family and the aging husband is son of a tremendous Civil War general. That, as a matter of fact, is the chief burden of the play. Both husband and wife have been overshadowed all their married life by the glorious heroism of this dead general. Miss Leighton and Mr. Bloch have to manoeuvre a great many characters through many manufactured situations to get the shadow removed. But they succeed in a steadily amusing third act.

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Meanwhile, Miss George makes everyone in the audience feel pleasantly crude and awkward by the lightness of her walk, the grace of her manners, the sweetness of her voice and the wit of her acting. She is personally a lady, which is rare enough, but she is also an actress who can put quicksilver into a play.

'SPRING AGAIN'

A comedy in three acts, by Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch; staged by Guthrie McClintic; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented by Mr. McClintic at Henry Miller's Theater on November 10, 1941. The cast:

Halstead Carter	C. Aubrey Smith
Nell Carter	Grace George
Elizabeth	Betty Breckenridge
Edith Weybright	Ann Andrews
Girard Weybright	Richard Stevenson
Bell Boy	Joe Patterson
Millicent Cornish	Jayne Cotter
Tom Cornish	John Craven
Robert Reynolds	Ben Lackland
Dr. Lionel Carter	Robert Keith
Joe Crumb	Michael Strong
L. J. O'Connor	Lawrence Fletcher
A Western Union Boy	Kirk Douglas
William Auchinschloss	Joseph Buloff
Arnold Greaves	William Talman

This is one of her most enchanting performances. As for Mr. Smith of the well-bred creases, the waxed mustache and the beak of a lion War general, he is perfectly matched with Miss George in this play. For he, too, is an enviable actor. He knows how to make his distinguished personality count in a play. It is a long time since he has acted in this neighborhood, but he is just as keen as he used to be when no drawing-room comedy was tolerable without him.

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Mr. McClintic has directed "Spring Again" with an impeccability worthy of his stars. The cast includes Ann Andrews, John Craven, Ben Lackland, Robert Keith and Jayne Cotter in parts for which they need not be eternally grateful. But the part of William Auchinschloss, the motion-picture tycoon, is one the authors have written with some knowledge and skill. They are on the home grounds in this territory. Why Mr. Buloff is not in every play is something this column will never understand, for he is an original comedian who is sensible enough to play for laughs. Although his style is broad, it is also insinuating. He acts the motion-picture despot with remarkable gusto, and he gives "Spring Again" the heartiness it needs.

"Spring Again"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 11, 1941*

Grace George and C. Aubrey Smith In a New Comedy, "Spring Again"

By WILELLA WALDORF

GUTHRIE McCLINTIC opened his Broadway season last night at Henry Miller's Theatre with "Spring Again," a comedy by Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch about an elderly couple whose lives are haunted by the spirit of a famous Civil War general.

It is, however, no ghost story. The general is present only as an oil painting, but his son, Halstead Carter, has made a career of unveiling statues of the noted warrior in public parks and instituting lawsuits against historians who have not been inclined to give the great man sufficient credit for preserving the Union.

Mrs. Halstead Carter, who has vivid memories of the general in a less historic aspect, is not inclined to share her husband's veneration for the hero of Shiloh, and one day, while the rest of the family is unveiling a new Carter statue on Riverside Drive—Commissioner Moses was caught short of trees—she and her grandson-in-law immortalize the old buzzard in a radio serial. The fifteen-minutes-a-day, five-days-a-week adventures of the general attract the attention of a sponsor, International Foods, and another Civil War ensues in the Halstead Carter hotel apartment when the news gets out that Mrs. Carter had turned her celebrated father-in-law into the villain of a soap opera.

Some Good Comedians

"Spring Again" is a mechanical comedy somewhat laboriously put together, but it has some funny lines and amusing situations to keep things merry, and the fact that C. Aubrey Smith and Grace George play the warring old couple makes it all seem merrier than it actually is.

Mr. Smith, back from the movie studios, is as irascible and as lovable as ever, dressing himself up for an unveiling in morning clothes and a silk hat, donning his Siege of Vicksburg cuff-links, and walking out of the house when anyone dares to suggest that Grant, Sherman or Meade may have been instrumental in winning a battle or two as well as General Carter.

Miss George, looking like a little cameo of a frail, lovely lady, still paces the stage with the tread of a thoroughbred and knows how to get every ounce of laughter out of a comedy line without ever overstepping the bounds of good taste. Miss George has an old-fashioned, patrician flavor to her playing, and when she is in the throes of a good scene everybody on the stage with her stands rooted to the spot or steps lively from here to there as she cracks the whip, like an animal trainer who knows his business and is taking no nonsense from anybody while the show is on.

It suddenly occurred to us last night that Miss George, in a blue uniform, hip boots, slouch hat and cigar, would have made a pretty good Union general herself had she happened to have lived back in '64.

To keep their comedy bubbling, the authors have dragged in an advertising man, amusingly played by Ben Lackland, who is going the rounds of descendants of Civil War generals getting indorsements for Union rye whiskey—"In Union there is strength." Ann Andrews, looking very smart indeed, lavishes a good performance on the role of the very social daughter who owns a stable of race horses as well as a rich, docile husband, and the young-love motif is nicely carried out by Jayne Cotter and John Craven. Robert Keith is genial and understanding as the cousin who is a psychiatrist and therefore totally unimpressed with the presence of a great general somewhere in his family tree.

The Hollywood Tycoon

Not until the third act, however, does "Spring Again" actually bring out the guffaws, for it is then that Joseph Buloff, playing a Hollywood tycoon, visits the Carter menage with an offer for the movie rights to the general. Mr. Buloff, who makes a habit of walking off with scenes, has everything his own way from the moment he arrives, and his sojourn is one long scream on the part of the audience.

Miss Leighton and Mr. Bloch, in fact, have themselves quite a time in "Spring Again," taking cracks at the movies, the radio, and the advertising business as well as breaking the spell of general-worship in the Carter family. And they seem to have a deep grudge against Philadelphia that manifests itself in several remarks in which that city is mentioned in far from flattering fashion. At each of these the audience laughed immoderately. Probably this is a problem for Mr. Keith, the psychiatrist, to solve. Why is Philadelphia-baiting a sure-fire laugh-getter on Broadway?

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 11, 1941*

'Spring Again' Opens at Miller's Theatre

Grace George Comically Portrays Wife in Ancestor-Ridden Household

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH "Spring Again" got off to a bad start in the first act at Henry Miller's Theatre last night, it pulled itself together, roused its dejected audience from its doze by an amusing second act, and had the house rocking happily through the third. Since the comedy leaves 'em laughing, the beginning may be safely discounted, and since Grace George shines throughout in a performance of rare lightness and comic brilliance, it scores two-thirds of a successful evening. For 15 minutes toward the end Joseph Buloff sketches a Hollywood mogul in a scene as funny as anything in town, thereby adding greatly to the play's tardy treasures.

It is difficult to see why the authors, Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch, fumble so long in getting the comedy in motion. Their opening dialogue, like a defective self-starter, makes groaning sounds but fails to get things going. Then just as I, for one, thought they ought to let the audience get out and walk (if only to the nearest exit) they went to town, and on floating Grace George-power.

This frail and luminous lady is, of course, just about the top ranking comedienne on the stage. Her comic playing is so polished, so faultless, so apparently effortless, that she bestows the glitter of her own wit and style on dialogue that seems hardly worth it. She can turn a line deftly when it appears to have no other merit than that she has memorized it.

In "Spring Again" we see her as the defeated wife of Halstead Carter, an elderly and pompous gentleman who spends most of his time in a silk hat having statues of his father, the famous Civil War General Carter, unveiled in various civic nooks and crannies.

To the Lady Nell the old General's memory has become an intolerable burden. She wisely knows that she and her children and grandchildren have been ancestor-ridden all their lives. After a brow-beaten lifetime dedicated to the hero, she feels that she has simply been living on intimate terms with a public monument. She throws something at his portrait at the end of the first act, and jolts the play wide awake.

From then on things get better and better. She contrives with the young writer, who is married to her granddaughter, to do a radio serial on "Life with the General," something as amiably amusing, I suppose, as "Life with Father."

The best of it comes when they find that their show is a huge success, and that the family is horrified at their impudence. The movies bid wildly for the rights and Mr. Buloff tops off the evening handsomely with his hilarious portrait of the man from Hollywood.

It isn't much of a plot but the central character provides an ideal frolic for Miss George, whose performance moves with a sort of mischievous internal merriment that is completely beguiling. C. Aubrey Smith as the gruff husband and father-idolater is immensely amusing, and while most of the other characters seem to have been written with some blunt instrument, they are animated to miscellaneous effect, chiefly by Ann Andrews, John Craven, Robert Keith, and Ben Lackland.

Guthrie McClintic, who produced the play, has also directed it with a shrewd eye to the scenes that make you forget and forgive the first act, and Donald Oenslager has set it pleasantly in a room that can reflect amusingly the lady's emancipation from the family portraits.

If it were all as good as its best moments it would be fine fun. But in an imperfect world where half a loaf is better than no bread, let us settle for two-thirds of a comedy and like it.

"Spring Again"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 11, 1941*

'Spring Again,' With Grace George, Opens at Henry Miller's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LAST evening's "Spring Again," which Guthrie McClintic brought into Henry Miller's Theater, is a gay, funny little comedy, made gayer and funnier by one of Grace George's airiest performances and further ornamented by some very nearly inspired fooling on the part of Joseph Buloff. None of the foregoing is to be interpreted as applying to the first act. Any resemblance between it and the drama is purely coincidental and not to be taken seriously.

All three acts are, presumably, the result of collaboration between Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch. They have thought up an entertaining little story about a winsome elderly lady whose husband has lived for sixty-odd years under the forbidding shadow of his father, who was a civil war general and in private life a pest. The lady has suffered, not altogether silently, and her days have been haunted by ancestor worship. Her revenge, which is both sweet and profitable, comes more or less by accident.

It comes when, as she tries to give a helping hand to a grandson-in-law who wants to write radio scripts, she dashes him off a rough sketch about life with father-in-law. One of those happy miracles so frequent on the stage instantly occurs, and the lady wows them. Money pours in from various directions, the movies clamor and the haughty family is turned upside down. Mr. Buloff appears, rarely comic as a Hollywood magnate; C. Aubrey Smith stalks the stage affronted; Miss George strokes the situation until it purrs and everything is very nice indeed, and very funny.

These are second and third act matters. The first act is merely dreary, marked chiefly by the determined effort and resounding failure of the authors to write funny lines and the frantic attempt of the actors, particularly poor Ann Andrews, to make them sound funny. If you want to enjoy "Spring Again," you'll just have to bear that, without grinning. Or, of course, arrive around 9:15. Those who so endure will find their fortitude rewarded.

Miss George is a great help to the authors throughout, and when she participates even jokes about night life in Philadelphia are amusing. She skims the cream from all the jests and gives the skim milk a creamy flavor. Mr. Buloff is, in a word, immense. Mr. Smith stalks amusingly along; Betty Breckenridge is an agreeably irresponsible maid and Ben Lackland and John Craven make the best of things which come their way. Miss Andrews is rather victimized, being the chief sufferer throughout of the authors' ill-founded assumption that they are wits instead of nimble enough designers of polite farce.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 11, 1941*

Two Valiant Veterans

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

TWO of the theater's most illustrious veterans are in delightful form in the new play called "Spring Again," and any special objection to their vehicle may sound rather querulous. Indeed, not only are Miss Grace George and C. Aubrey Smith performing with characteristic charm, but in a small and effective role the expert Joseph Buloff is giving his most hilarious portrayal. All of this makes for pleasant fun, and the worst that can be said for the new comedy by Isabel Leighton and Bertram Bloch is that it is not worthy of so much talent. A mild and harmless little play, too artificially and elaborately fabricated for comfort, it is beyond being made into a good or consistently interesting dramatic work, but its playing does give it a gracious sort of amiability.

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"Spring Again" is the story of an engaging old couple who are haunted by a memory from history. All of his life Halstead Carter had existed under the shadow of the fame of his father, a celebrated Civil War general, but, while he had made rather a career of it, his poor wife had been resentfully enslaved by the dead soldier's domineering fame. How the wife finally rebelled, how her rebellion brought fame and a Hollywood offer but almost completed the wrecking of her home: this is the substance of a comedy that has a number of funny moments and at least possesses the virtue of getting better as it goes along. What keeps the new work from being the pleasant foolery that its playing should make it is the laborious way in which it has been plotted and the desultory manner in which it has been written.

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Nevertheless the two stars do brighten the proceedings almost irresistibly by the mellow glow of their graciousness, their charm and their fine expertness. It is a rare delight to have Mr. Smith back in the theatre, and he is altogether wonderful in his performance, even though it is not easy to think of him as the son of an American general of Civil War days. Having been for so long the favorite British commander in chief of all of us, he has become so monumental a figure that it is almost impossible to think of him as the offspring of a great soldier and not that great soldier himself. Indeed, that monumental quality is so impressive that it is difficult to think of him as a son of any one save possibly of some ancient chieftain of Britain who had warred against Julius Caesar. But it would be a delight and a comfort to see him, no matter what he happened to be playing.

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Miss George is, of course, equally welcome, even though we have had the good fortune to see her frequently of recent seasons. The charm of her manner, the radiant graciousness of her appearance and the gallant youthfulness of her spirit are at their peak as the rebellious wife, and we would have to forgive even a worse play than "Spring Again" for providing her with so proper a role. Then, it is worth repeating, Mr. Buloff is present in the brief part of a dynamic Hollywood producer, and he is quite triumphantly comic in that entirely original fashion of his. In addition, there are good performances by Miss Ann Andrews as a domineering matron, by Miss Jayne Cotter as a granddaughter, by Miss Betty Breckenridge as a maid, by John Craven as an ambitious writer, by Ben Lackland as an advertising man and by Robert Keith as a psychiatrist. "Spring Again" may not be a good play, but Miss George, Mr. Smith and Mr. Buloff are a treat.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 11, 1941

Half a Play Is Better Than None

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE chief failing of *Spring Again* is that it doesn't really warm up until the show is more than half over. In the first act, its comedy is forced and its interest flickering, and for much of the second, though things are a little better, they are still not good enough. All that keeps the play going up to that point is a remarkably deft and charming performance by that always good actress, Grace George. Then, suddenly, things get brighter, and during much of the last act they are even fairly uproarious.

The authors of *Spring Again* can certainly toss off funny lines. They can also, when they manage to invent them, carry off whole scenes. Their principal weakness is that old-fashioned ailment known as plot trouble: they have made things hard for themselves by writing a comedy around what is really a bright idea rather than a full-fledged comic situation. *Spring Again* is concerned with an old gentleman who has spent his life revering—to the point of driving his wife crazy—the memory of his father, a great general in the Civil War. The wife finally takes revenge by uncorking the less heroic episodes in the warrior's life in the form of a radio script. First the script catches on; then the old gentleman does—and naturally blows up. After that the play comes to life: the movies want to buy the script, and there is a hilarious scene when a Hollywood producer, complete with accent, mannerisms and the nerve of a brass monkey, barges in and performs for all he is worth. The way things were going by then, if *Spring Again* had had a fourth act, it would have been a smash. As it is, there are certainly things to be thankful for, but I don't think there's enough to go round.

Miss George's performance is in her lightest manner, filled with grace and wit and done with style. As the old gentleman, C. Aubrey Smith looks the part perfectly and plays it with testy yet never-strident humor. As the Hollywood magnet, Joseph Buloff does a richly comic job, hardly pausing for breath in his ingratiating exhibition of humbug and bad manners. In other roles, Ben Lackland is amusing, Ann Andrews is competent if a little too high-pitched, Jayne Cotter is agreeable, and John Craven is pleasant if not wholly at ease. Mr. McClintic's direction is for the most part effective, and Donald Oenslager's set is attractive.